



NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING

November 14, 2022

The State Neighborhood Revitalization Advisory Board (advisory board) held a remote meeting on Monday, November 14, 2022, at 9:00 AM. The [agenda](#) and a [videorecording](#) are available online.

Board Members or Designees:

Matthew Abbott, [City of Bridgeport, Office of Planning & Economic Development](#)
Linda Brunza, [CT Dept. of Environmental Protection](#)
Julie Carmelich, [CT State Historic Preservation Office](#)
Janice Castle, [City of Hartford](#)
Andrew Clark, [Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy](#)
Jennifer Edwards, [CT Social Equity Council](#)
David Elder, [CT Dept. of Transportation](#)
Mike Gilmore, [Waterbury Development Corporation](#)
Marion Griffin, [Hartford NEXT](#)
Martin Heft (Chair), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)
Matt Pafford, [CT Dept. of Administrative Services](#)
Mark Polzella, [CT Dept. of Labor](#)
Laura Watson, [CT Dept. of Housing](#)

Others:

Maureen Goulet, [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#)
Jean Holloway, Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (Hartford)
Debi Martin, [LISC Connecticut](#)
Bruce Wittchen (staff), [CT Office of Policy & Management](#)

1. Welcome, Introductions, Adoption of Minutes

Martin Heft called the meeting of the [Neighborhood Revitalization Zone](#) (NRZ) Advisory Board to order at 9:05 and asked everyone to introduce themselves. A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [September 8, 2022, Meeting Minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

2. Frog Hollow (Hartford) NRZ Carey Shea, Interim Chair, [Frog Hollow NRZ](#)

Carey Shea provided a [presentation](#) on Hartford's Frog Hollow NRZ. She summarized the NRZ's recent leadership history and provided an overview of the neighborhood's location and history. She also described major landmarks and characteristics of the community. Slides 3& 4 show the diversity of buildings in the neighborhood and Carey highlighted that historic features have been removed from the multifamily home on the

left on Slide 4 in violation of city ordinance. Blighted buildings include several owned by Hartford Hospital, as shown in the upper right of that slide.

Slide 5 states the purpose of the NRZ and Slide 6 lists activities. Carey explained that information has been the most important role of the NRZ and Slide 7 lists who attends meetings. She said the city attends but said renters are under-represented at meetings. Referring to Slide 8, Carey explained that developers and property owners are encouraged to present projects to NRZs, but highlighted that there are disparities in different NRZs' capacity to be a local forum for such presentations.

Marion Griffin said the process is in place for proposals to go to NRZs but needs improvement. She added that some developers do not know the requirement. Carey mentioned following NY City's [Uniform Land Use Review Procedure](#) (ULURP) when there and noted the role of community boards. She said some developers and property owners do come to the NRZ regarding their projects, 1-2 per meeting, and mentioned recent presentations regarding the Children's Hospital. Carey proceeded to the next slide listing recent proposals: a methadone clinic, signage, and liquor permits. Marion Griffin added that the city asks developers if they have been to the NRZ.

The next slide lists member generated activities and Carey said a previous NRZ member pushed traffic calming so the NRZ worked on that. She listed other member interests on that slide, highlighting the NRZs efforts regarding blighted buildings owned by Hartford Hospital, and added that the NRZ has also been involved with the historic chapel at the Zion Hill cemetery.

Carey proceeded to the Challenges and Aspirations slide and said the NRZ would like more participation by neighborhood residents. She pointed out the challenges in a neighborhood where a very high proportion of residents are renters and a high proportion lack a car. She said the lack of an ownership interest in the neighborhood and limited transit reduce participation. She noted that they do get more turnout for hot issues but it's temporary.

Carey said it can be difficult to find new leadership and added that the preference is for the president to be a resident. She also mentioned the challenges of maintaining the NRZ's website and social media and pointed out the desire for productive engagement. She explained that meetings are enjoyable and the ability to share information is helpful, but they want NRZ meetings to be more productive.

Carey said document management is a challenge because documents have not been kept in a single place due through leadership transitions. As for strategic planning, the city provided a small planning team, but COVID interfered and resulted in a less than robust planning effort. She did say the outcome could have been better if the effort had been more organized in advance.

Carey concluded by highlighting the need for right-sizing. It's an all-volunteer effort at this time, which limits what the NRZ can do. There are terrific things to do but they lack the capacity. They can try to increase their capacity and she noted the importance of not failing at things they lack the capacity to actually do. Organizations like this need paid staffing and Carey pointed out the importance of state, corporate, other philanthropy for nonprofits to succeed. Bruce Wittchen noted the relevance of the points Carey made to the topic of Sec. 4 of the agenda: "Revitalizing the NRZs and the state NRZ advisory board."

3. Updates, Questions, and Comments

- Local Updates and/or Questions
- State Updates and/or Questions
- Other Updates, Comments, or Questions

Carey Shea said the [State Historic Preservation Office](#) (SHPO) will attend the Frog Hollow NRZ's meeting on Tuesday. She added that the NRZ process could benefit from more participation like that. Julie Carmelich asked for agendas to be sent to her and SHPO will participate when possible. Maureen Goulet mentioned that the [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#) (CRCOG) has brownfield funding and would be happy to participate.

Janice Castle mentioned some ongoing Hartford efforts, including [Love Hartford Week](#) in October, the *Love Your Block* grant program, and a toy collection effort. Marion Griffin followed up on Carey's earlier mention of the Frog Hollow NRZ planning effort by noting that [Hartford NEXT](#) was fortunate to have a [LISC Connecticut](#) volunteer involved with neighborhood planning in three Hartford neighborhoods and work this month will set up the blueprint for engaging with residents.

4. Revitalizing the NRZs and the state NRZ advisory board

Martin Heft mentioned the role of the [NRZ statutes](#) and read the list of possible advisory board actions from the agenda:

- What information should be provided to NRZs to provide guidance?
- What is the appropriate level of oversight? (see [Hartford NRZ compliance checklist](#))
- What are options and limitations for in-person, fully remote, and hybrid meeting?
- Funding and other non-training capacity development: what do NRZs need/want?
- Needs assessments of individual NRZs?
- Reintroduce the state Advisory Board to NRZs: city by city?

Bruce Wittchen highlighted the desire to develop guidance for NRZs, noting that many NRZ leaders and members are not familiar with the requirements and expectations for NRZs. He offered to reach out to municipalities and NRZs to learn what procedures and guidance they currently are using, noting the agenda's link to Hartford's [NRZ Compliance Checklist](#). He explained that Hartford NRZs wanting access to city funding must document that they comply with state and local requirements. There are other approaches too.

Matthew Abbott said he is interested in this because Bridgeport has a very activated NRZ community and mentioned the city's NRZ website efforts. Bruce Wittchen mentioned that Bridgeport collects annual reports from its NRZs and that those reports illustrate the range of capacity of NRZs. Some have long and detailed reports, others are brief. He encourages NRZs to provide anything, even an email with a few sentences saying what they are doing. That's a start and

Hartford's checklist takes it to a higher level of compliance, ensuring NRZs comply with [Freedom of Information](#) requirements for public meetings. Bruce and Matthew will discuss this further after this meeting.

Bruce asked Janice Castle, who had provided Hartford's checklist to him, if the checklist works and whether the connection to city function is significant. Janice highlighted the importance of NRZs being compliant so people know what they are doing and pointed out that, when they receive funding, it is important to receive documentation of spending to avoid potential conflicts of interest. She also mentioned the range of capacity of individual NRZs and pointed out that Carey Shea can look back and see records of elections and who has led meetings. That is not possible for all NRZs, even to know when current leaders became leaders. The city is working on this and needs to be consistent and educate residents.

Marion Griffin said communication is key and it is necessary to repeat, repeat, repeat what the expectations are. An annual reminder would be very helpful. She noted that she knew little when she became involved with NRZs. Education is important and there should be frequent communication. Bruce Wittchen mentioned someone suggesting at a previous meeting that there be tiers of expectations for NRZs, with a higher level for NRZs that receive funding and a lower level of expectations for those that are not ready for that yet but still need to follow Freedom of Information requirements.

Bruce Wittchen offered to start an outline of a guidance document for the group's consideration at the next meeting. He skipped ahead in the agenda to point out the tentative schedule of quarterly meetings in 2023 and asked if there are any comments regarding that. He will email everyone later to confirm a schedule and said the group can work through the various tasks beginning in January.

Luz Holmes asked about the discussion of possible NRZ funding from the [CT Social Equity Council](#) that had been discussed at a previous meeting. Jennifer Edwards of the SEC had to leave this meeting early and Bruce Wittchen mentioned the SEC's Ginne-Rae Clay discussing that last month. His understanding is that they are still focused on their licensing work and will get to that next step afterwards. It is important and should be on this group's next agenda.

There was further discussion of the proposed 2023 schedule and Martin Heft asked anyone who has a possible topic for a future meeting to contact Bruce.

5. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:13.